



Restriction on Religious Freedom in Iran

Challenges to Religious Freedom

THE GOVERNMENT

Iran's constitution establishes the country as an Islamic Republic and the Jaafari school of Shi'a Islam to be the official state religion. While the constitution also protects minority religions, the government regularly discriminates against its citizens based upon religion and belief. This happens because all laws and regulations must be based upon "Islamic criteria" and the official interpretation of Shi'a. Iran's apostasy laws, generally referred to as mofsed-e-filarz ("spreading corruption on earth"), are a severe threat to religious freedom within Iran. It is a capital crime under Iran's penal code for non-Muslims to convert Muslims, as are moharebeh ("enmity against God") and sabb al-nabi ("insulting the prophet"). According to Amnesty International, 22 individuals were executed on charges of moharebeh in 2015, a common recourse of the Iranian government in dealing with dissidents.³ The United Nations' Special Rapporteur's 2014 report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that 895 prisoners of conscience remained imprisoned, 292 of whom were identified as religious practitioners as of January 14, 2014.⁴

SOCIETAL TENSIONS

Despite official protections, many religious minorities, both Muslim and non-Muslim, continue to be discriminated against in Iran. However, the Baha'i, another faith-based group, are without any kind of protection. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, along with other UN officials have found the Baha'i to be the "most severely persecuted religious minority" in Iran.⁵ At differing levels of society, non-Muslims continue to face discrimination, including personal harassment.

Country Overview: Iran



CIA World Factbook 2017

- **Government:**
Theocratic Republic
- **Supreme Leader:**
Ali Khamenei
- **President:**
Hassan Rouhani
- **Population:** 82.8 Million
- **Ethnic Groups:**
Persian 61%, Azerbaijani 16%, Kurd 10%, Luri 6%, Turkmen 2%, Arab 2%, Balochi 2%, Other 1%¹
- **Religions:** Muslim 99.1% (Shi'a 90%, Sunni 10%), Other 0.3%²

Testimony of Persecution

Farhang Amiri

It was a quiet evening on September 25, 2016, when Mr. Amiri was brutally stabbed outside of his home in Yazd, Iran. Two young men were arrested, and, upon being questioned about their motive, one of the men stated that they killed Mr. Amiri because they knew he was a Baha'i.

Mr. Amiri's murder is a result of the consistent encouragement from the Iranian government to engage in bigotry against the Baha'is. The Baha'is face ongoing persecution, both governmental and societal, daily within Iran, with little respite.⁶

Ebrahim Firoozi

In 2010, Ebrahim Firoozi made the momentous decision to convert from Islam to Christianity and shortly afterward was thrown into prison for converting and for organizing Christian gatherings. To this day Ebrahim remains imprisoned after being convicted for "propaganda against the

state," among other charges. Despite President Rouhani's 2013 pledge to provide justice for religious minorities, persecution of Christians continues.⁷

Call to Action

STUDY

Study the following passages in light of religious persecution in Iran.

- 1 Peter 4:1
- Acts 5:29
- Psalms 119:157
- Matthew 5:10-12

PRAY

- That activists for religious freedom now in prison are given their freedom
- For growth of church communities' faith, their protection and their leadership
- That the Iranian government will stop persecuting people for expressing their religious beliefs
- That President Rouhani will uphold his promise to protect the rights of religious minorities

LEARN

For a deeper understanding of the suffering endured by religious minorities in Iran, read *Captive in Iran*, the eye-opening account of Maryam Rostampour and Marziyeh Amirizadeh's brutal imprisonment at the hands of the Iranian government.⁸

STAND

Stand in solidarity with these people of faith by becoming informed and subscribing to Wilberforce's e-newsletter at 21wilberforce.org, like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter @21Wilberforce.

As religious freedom advocates, we mobilize and equip partners, including Christians, activists and people of other faiths, to promote global protections and reforms through Advocacy, Capacity Building and Technology.



[1] <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/largest-ethnic-groups-in-iran.html>
[2] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>
[3] <https://www.amnesty.org.nz/iran-broadcasting-injustice-boasting-mass-killing>
[4] <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/united-nations-reports/un-reports/1000000443-special-rapporteurs-march-2014-report-on-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran.html>
[5] http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017_USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf
[6] <https://www.bic.org/news/bahai-killed-iran-victim-religious-hatred>
[7] <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/06/ebrahim-firoozi/>
[8] <http://captiveiniran.com>
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